The Role of Social Work in National Development

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1   Definition of social work

Defining social work entails describing the roles and functions of social workers. Although many attempts have been made to define social work, there have been some disagreements in trying to come up with a universal definition of social work. Thus, without a general agreement on what constitutes social work, it is difficult to definitively delineate what the roles and functions of social work are or should be. The apparent failure to reach an agreement on what social work is partly accounts for the gap between what social workers say they want to achieve and what they are practically able to achieve (http://www.scotland.gov.uk). According to Cree (2003:3), "it is almost impossible to find a simple definition of social work with which everyone is likely to agree". Be that as it may, various scholars have attempted to develop definitions of social work, ranging from the seemingly simple and straightforward ones to the relatively complex and comprehensive, including the following.

According to Farley and Smith (2006:7), "social work is an art, a science, a profession that helps people to solve personal, group (especially family), and community problems and to attain satisfying personal, group, and community relationships through social work practice". Probably the most comprehensive, authoritative and most widely used definitions of the concept is the one that states that social work is "a profession which promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilizing theories of human behavior and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work" (International Association of Schools of Social Work: 2001).

From the above definitions, it follows that social work consists of organized and systematic efforts to secure the highest personal and social satisfaction for individuals, groups and communities. Its auspices may be voluntary, governmental or combination of both. Social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments, and aims at enabling all people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction (http://www.sozialarbeit.at/). Conventionally, social work tends to fall under three major methodological categories.

2   Social casework

Traditionally, this approach has focused on those individuals who could not achieve a fairly normal adjustment to life and needed outside attention. It is concerned with people who are in particular situations of need. Casework is done on a person-by-person basis, in situations where privacy is necessary in attending to individual problems, for example, in a hospice, a women's shelter, or a drug rehabilitation centre.

The idea of a social worker acting as a caseworker or a counselor is a recurrent and powerful notion in social work throughout its history, and has also been closely associated with some of the key values of social work and particularly recognizing the inherent worth of the individual and respecting him or her. Casework also appeals to those whose view of social work as a whole is one in which helping or supporting individuals is a key component (http://www.scontland.gov.uk/). The method involves bringing change in the behavior or outlook of a client. According to Popple and Leighninger (2004: 8), social work is a core technology in social welfare institution, the institution in society that deals with problem of dependency; that is every member of society has a number of social positions or statuses that go with specified roles, and if a member fails to perform his/her roles adequately or social institutions fail to extend help to them, then social stability is threatened and social work has to intervene.

Popple and Leighninger (2004) further point out that the social work profession has two targets. The first target is that of helping individuals who are having difficulty meeting individual role expectations, which is referred to as micro practice or clinical social work (social casework). The other target of social work concerns those aspects of social institutions that fail to support individuals in their efforts to fulfill role expectations; this is referred to as macro practice. *Social casework* involves working with the client to: 1. assess and identify individual and family strengths and needs; 2. develop a case plan to provide appropriate supports and services; 3. implement the case plan using community resources; 4. coordinate and monitor the provision of services, and 5. evaluate client progress and the case plan to determine continued need for services.

3 Social group work

Group work aims at the improved functioning of group members through greater ability for a mature relationship, self-awareness and a greater sense of belonging. Supportive treatments, such as clarification, suggestion, development of alternative solutions, and reflection, are used by social workers through group processes and interpersonal relationships. Social group work utilizes the group as a tool to bring about desired changes in social functioning with troubled persons (Farley et al, 2006:9).

Social group work as a social work method was recognized and developed as a social work intervention during the 1940s and 1950s. In conjunction with community organization, social group work emphasizes the situational context of behavioral change. These approaches have both contributed significantly to the transformation of the social work profession, that is, from being merely remedial (social casework) to being developmental (DuBois and Miley, 2005:38). Social group work involves use of small group interaction as a mechanism to facilitate social change. It focuses on enrichment, education and social reform, and uses the interplay of personalities in group processes to achieve cooperative group action that addresses common goals. It emphasizes the use of creative groups as a vehicle for change, and group members' participation and democratic control is considered to be highly essential (Reid, 1983 as cited in DuBouis and Miley, 2005). It offers opportunities for learning, joint action, role modeling, relationship building, empowerment and change (Brown, 2002).

4 Community welfare organisation

This method does not focus so much on the individual and his or her personal needs or the group and its viability as on the overall and general welfare needs of the community as a whole. Also known as community development, it is carried out by groups of people who agree to undertake projects and programmes, largely voluntarily, for the benefit of their

communities. The basic aim is to enhance the self-reliance of the community and its ability to maintain its growth. By its nature, community organization creates changes in large groups and organizational units, mostly in situations or in environments which in turn affect personal well-being (DuBois and Miley, 2005).

Community organization entails bringing people together to deal with shared problems and to increase their say about decisions that affect their lives. This approach also entails engaging in a broad range of social change activities, including advocacy with and on behalf of the community for reform underlying social, political, and economic conditions that undermine human dignity, and social workers are normally the primary professional leaders of highly effective community welfare organization worldwide (Estes, 1997:43). Community organization addresses problem such as lack affordable housing, drug abuse, discrimination and lack of access to health care.

Community organizing helps develop people's skills, their sense of efficacy and competence, and their sense of worth; it also creates capacity for democracy and for sustained social change (Rubin and Rubin, 1992:3). Furthermore, as Farley et al (2006) point out, community organization is the inter-group approach geared toward tackling social pathologies and increasing understanding of community needs and helping to address them.

Apart from the above three principal methods, social work includes the ancillary, supportive or enabling processes of social administration and social work research.

5   Social administration

As modern social work becomes increasingly institutionalized, there is a need to know about the organization of the relevant institutions, such as schools, hospitals and the criminal justice system. Administrative skills and the ability to design administrative structures are highly desirable. Social administration is the area of social work concerned with the practicalities of service organization and delivery. In the United States, it is dealt with as 'public policy' or 'policy analysis' (http://www2.rgu.ac.uk). "More specifically, social work administration is a practice intervention used by social workers to achieve service effectiveness and organizational change. As a client-centered intervention, social administration requires the systematic and purposeful application of skills, knowledge, and values. The skills and knowledge are required to improve a program's service effectiveness" (http://depts.washington.ed).

6   Social work research

This is "the systematic, critical investigation of questions in the social welfare field with the purpose of yielding answers to problems of social work and of extending and generalizing social work knowledge and concepts (Friedlander, 1958: 293). Apart from conducting their own research, social workers also document the scholarly work of and engage in collaborative research with other human service professionals such as doctors, nurses and psychologists.

Krysk and Finn (2007) observe that social workers are expected to use research to boost the profession's scientific status and as a tool for improving social conditions. These writers highlight four functions of social work research, notably: promoting the scientific method as a way of knowing; increasing accountability through program evaluation; facilitating information gathering and effective communication; and enhancing access to resources which can be used to help their clientele.

7 National development

Both in theory and in practice, development is as inconsistent as it is complex. Because of the conceptual and process–related inconsistency and complexity associated with development, this author will limit the use of the term to its contemporary sense as defined by scholars engaged in revamping the concept to meet the needs of the people in the developing world.

According to Walter Rodney (1972), at the level of the individual, development has the implications of increased skill and capacity, freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being. At the level of society, he goes on, the concept connotes increasing capacity to regulate internal as well as external relations.

As for Todaro and smith (2003), the term development may mean different things for different people and may be defined from different perspectives. From the economic perspective, development means the capacity of a national economy, whose initial economic status has been more or less static for a long time, to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product (GNP) at the rates of perhaps 5% to 7% or more. Todaro continues to indicate that development has also been economically defined using rates of growth of income per capita or per capita GNP taking into account the ability of a nation to expand its output at the rate faster than its population. Thus, any nation may be said to be achieving some level of development if its per capita output is growing faster than its population. Economic development has further been seen in terms of the planned alteration of the structure of production and employment.

Apart from the aforementioned economic views, there are some social indicators of development, including gains in literacy, schooling, health conditions and services, and provision of housing; development has, therefore, been redefined in terms of reduction or elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment within the context of growing economy in order to improve the quality of people's lives. That is, for any country, if poverty, inequality and unemployment have all declined from high levels, then that implies some level of development for that country (Todaro, and Smith, 2003). Additionally, Stutz and De Sousa (1998: 543) note that the United Nations has devised a Human Development Index (HDI) to measure national human development of both developing and developed countries; this HDI comprises demographic, social and economic factors such as life expectancy, literacy rate and per capita purchasing power, respectively.

In summary, development is both material and social. Material in terms of economic growth and increased productivity, and social in terms of qualitative changes in peoples' lives, attitudes, institutions and external relationships. "It is an ongoing, dynamic process by which individuals identify themselves as a community and are collectively empowered to use the necessary knowledge, values and organizational skills to sustainably share and enhance that community's resources and to bring about positive change for the benefit of all its members; development is realization of rights, especially economic, cultural and social rights aimed at ending poverty, inequalities, suffering and injustice" (Oxfam Community Aid Abroad, 2001).

8 The contribution of social work to national development in a nutshell

All nations need both social and economic resources to achieve national development. In this regard, social work can generally mediate the process of development through enabling individuals and the society to reach out for each other through a mutual need for self-fulfillment. Thus, social workers are mandated to mobilize and deliver a wide range of services to their clientele (Bernstein, 1995:54). Bernstein further contends that social workers

are expected to assist in restoring, maintaining and enhancing the social functioning of individuals and the society; this responsibility entails the development, procurement and/or delivery of resources and services to meet the many and varied needs of their clients. In this sense, social work can be seen to be playing a major role in national development through empowerment of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of people in many countries, both developed and less developed.

9   Social casework

In modern societies where traditional norms and values have either broken, or are fast breaking down, situations, of what Durkheim refers to as "anomie" have become quite common. Though individual means of livelihood in many countries have generally improved, many people still face difficult existential conditions, for example in situations characterized by war, famine, poverty, crime, disease, and associated personal and familial traumas and maladjustments. Social workers (caseworkers) are required to mitigate the effects of these problems. Their role in providing support and a sense of belonging to maladjusted persons cannot be overestimated.

Using their professional skills and knowledge, social case workers help in assessing the clients' needs and applying agency, community and public welfare resources and programmes to address relevant social, health or economic problems. They help clients who become eligible for a variety services designed to improve their economic, social and/or health functioning, thereby working toward improving the clients' quality of life or standard of living. (http://www.social workers.org).

10 Social group work

Drug and alcohol addicts, unemployed school leavers, juvenile offenders, criminals, people with physical and mental disabilities, older adults, are among many groups that call for social work intervention in contemporary societies. No nation can be deemed to be developed where these health and social problems are rampant and do not receive appropriate attention from statutory and non-governmental welfare organizations. It is in the light of this that virtually all national governments throughout the world have established departments or ministries of social welfare. Hardly any nation exists in the world without such a department, if not a whole ministry. These institutions are responsible for formulating and implementing social policies and programmes for assisting such needy and vulnerable groups.

11 Community development/organization

Community organization is currently one of the most popular methods of social work worldwide. This method or approach places much emphasis on self-help projects and programs which are undertaken by the people themselves to meet their own felt needs and advance their overall economic and social development. In some countries, the Department of Community Development is almost exclusively responsible for rural development. Apart from rural areas, community welfare programmes play an important part in urban development schemes. Slum clearance, rehabilitation of mental patients, vocational rehabilitation, provision of recreational facilities and low-income housing programmes are common examples.

According to Estes (1997), community development practice has always been at the conceptual center of social work practice in urban areas for the following three reasons: 1) community work seeks to unite previously unorganized people into effective groups and coalitions that work together in pursuit of a shared social agenda (e.g., improved schools,

safer neighborhoods); 2) community work seeks to strengthen traditional family, kinship, and neighborhood ties in the community and to develop new social arrangements that are essential to the effective functioning of communities; and 3) community-based social services are among the most effective and cost-effective approaches for serving the poor.

In community development, social workers work in cooperation with the community to identify the needs and to develop or improve services and systems to meet those needs. Community organization social workers endeavor to improve socio-economic systems and generate resources so that more people in the community will have access to the services they need to function at their best. They usually work for, or with governmental, private or community organizations to determine community needs, and to recommend and develop new resources (http://www.social workers.org).

Community development occurs when people organize themselves to develop long-term strategies for problem solving (Rubin and Rubin, 1992). Estes (1997) points out that community development focuses on self-help and voluntary cooperation among members or residents of the disadvantaged communities or sectors of society; it also strives to the further acquisition or redistribution of resources on behalf of the poor and marginalized social groups.

12 Social administration

Social administration is crucial in shaping institutional or organizational structures which facilitate the achievement of national goals. These goals are not restricted to welfare ones only, but extend over technical, economic, agricultural and whatever other desirables may be an integral part of national development. Social administrators provide services to a variety of clients to improve their quality of life. By fostering intensive interactions between themselves and their clientele or target groups, social administrators unleash those humane and emotional factors which might be impeded by scientific and pseudo-scientific, materialistic or administrative models. The importance of social administration is shown, among others, by its emergence as a distinct academic discipline in so many universities across the world.

In their role as administrators, social workers oversee national programs and systems that provide social, health and public welfare services, which are intended to enhance the people's quality of life and to help them achieve the desired standard of living. Based on their understanding of the mission of organizations for which they work, social workers administer the material and financial resources necessary to ensure that social programmes operate as effectively and efficiently as possible. They also engage in continuous evaluation of programmes to determine whether social services are being delivered effectively and humanely and institute corrective measures where necessary (http://www.socialworkers.org).

13 Social research

Research facilitates the investigation and analysis of social needs and problems and provides directions to policies and actions that help to make remedial goals identifiable and achievable. It makes possible an inter-disciplinary usage of human knowledge by contributing to and utilizing existing knowledge. It is in recognition of the value of research to national development that universities throughout the world have established centres of research and development.

Social workers conduct social research to investigate the causes of social problems such as poverty, homelessness and substance abuse which hinder national development and to

evaluate the effectiveness of agency programme operations aimed at mitigating such problems. Their research findings are analyzed and recommendations made regarding remedial policies and programmes (http://www.social workers.org).

14 The contribution of social work to national development globally

The evolution of social work and efforts to promote social development can be seen as closely linked to the primordial tendency of humans to help one another in all past human societies. In traditional, including African, societies, the concern for social welfare was reflected in activities within the family, the clan and ethnic group. The urge of man to help man in all societies was demonstrated by the great care accorded to, *inter alia*, children, orphans, widows, widowers and the invalid as well as the elderly. In such "gemmeinschaft" (Tonnies, 1887), social work was more or less a task for everyone instead of individuals and specialized agencies. As such, social work has always been geared towards improving the quality of life of each and everyone.

Social work as it is known today has relatively recent origins. It emerged at a time when feudalism was disintegrating and capitalism taking its place. The control of the family and the church was fast weakening too. According to Fink et al (1968:27), these fundamental social changes began occurring between 1834 and 1909 and ushered in the development in Britain of specialized care agencies for certain vulnerable and disadvantaged groups, such as dependent children and people living with physical or mental disabilities. Institutions such as district schools, foster homes, hospitals, infirmaries and special schools were provided for these groups.

In the United States within the first two decades of the 20th century, the country was undergoing transformation from an agricultural to an industrial economy. Social problems accompanying this social change necessitated intervention from the state and non-governmental organizations, thus attracting the attention of those who sought to alleviate the burdens of new conditions in a fast urbanizing and industrializing nation. In response to the vices of poverty, dependence, disease and others there were efforts to provide improved medical care, prevent child labour and abuse, apply safeguards to hazardous working conditions and improve the lives of the aged and those with disabilities. All these social welfare measures constitute a vital contribution to national development. In countries like USA, social work has grown so much that it is now regarded as the most important profession in that country. There are also suggestions that the profession should be vigorously exported to other parts of the world as a matter of American foreign policy (Farley et al, 2006: 13)

At any rate, social work is increasingly becoming globalized, for it is being applied in a variety of settings and numerous agencies and people across the world are benefiting from its services. Among the social work services provided are: "psychiatry, medical, marriage and family counseling; the school; rehabilitation; corrections; public welfare; workplace; drug abuse; and child welfare" (Farley et al, 2006: 13). Social work does not only address needs and problems at the personal or family level but also at the neighborhood, national and international level.

15 Contribution of social work to national development in LDCs

The discussion so far has highlighted the origins and contribution of social work to development in the Western developed world, especially in countries such as USA and Britain. Social work is of no lesser significance to development in other regions of the world.

At this juncture, therefore, the discussion will be directed to the role of social work to development in the regions of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

In the rapidly changing societies of the so-called Global South, it is vital that certain traditional values and norms are preserved in order to prevent total social and cultural breakdown and related chaotic situation of normlessness, lack of self-identification and the absence of a sense of belonging. It is also important that these societies avoid the pitfalls of developmental mistakes experienced by developed societies. By virtue of their professional training, social workers are strategically positioned to provide the necessary safeguards in this regard.

There seems to be general recognition that social work has in the past treated only the most overt problems of urban destitution and maladjustment and that the profession has done little to promote the welfare of the majority population, especially where the vulnerable and rural people are concerned. Consequently, many social workers have come to realize that their conventional approaches have had rather limited impact on social needs and problems in LDCs. As a result, social workers have begun to seek new ways of expanding social work's professional roles in order to deal more effectively with the problems of mass deprivation in these countries. Thus, they have begun to explore how they can apply the social developmental model to tackle social needs and problems obtaining in LDCs (Midgley, 1978:174).

In further attempts to improve people's quality of life globally, the social work profession has expanded its services into international social work which has been a critical component of the United Nations' efforts to rehabilitate the people displaced and traumatized by war in such regions as the Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa (Farley et al, 2006: 13). Political instability in the war-ravaged countries is usually the result of inequality and oppression which often translates into political resentment, unrest and conflict. A country with a high level of inequality is not conducive to peace and stability (Graaff, 2004:11). As expected, social workers operating in these war-torn regions are required to provide much needed aid and counseling, part of which pertains to HIV and AIDS (Farley et al, 2006: 13).

Rapid social change in LDCs is closely linked to the technological, economic and political changes occurring in these societies. Notwithstanding these phenomenal changes, not enough attention has been given to the human and social repercussions of these forces of modernization. Although we are witnessing relatively high levels of economic growth in some of these countries, the rise in material standards does not seem to be commensurate with improvement in human values and social standards. Although economic growth creates increasing opportunities for better life and social progress, these achievements do not automatically generate genuine development. Unequal distribution of power and resources tends to generate conflicts and violence in society, hence, social workers should be concerned with structural change aimed at redressing inequality and improving the responsiveness of institutions to people's needs. In this regard, social work employs advocacy and empowerment as strategies for promoting client control and involvement in all aspects of their lives (Bernstein, 1995: 55). To have equality in income and access to goods and services, improvements in individual living standards, to promote freedom and self esteem and to effect positive changes in popular attitudes and institutions, deliberate efforts have to be made to seize and utilize the opportunities of economic development in both developed and less developed countries.

To be sure, the twin processes of industrialization and urbanization taking place in the Global South do pose great challenges for social work in the same way as they have done in the Global North. The major consequences of these processes for the LDCs, which are almost the same as those that have taken place in the developed world over the past two centuries, include rural-urban drift, disintegration of the role of the family, unplanned parenthood, individualism, increased crime and delinquency, physical and mental disability, slums, unemployment, inadequate social services, and sexual immorality. Social work is needed to minimize the strains and stresses associated with these social problems and to provide programmes of social improvement which will prevent individual maladjustments and social disruptions. Social workers can contribute to the formulation of social policies and programmes which, if properly conceived and implemented, will enhance economic development.

Furthermore, as Kwame Nkurumah's Minister of Social Welfare and Community Development Osei Owusu Afrive once noted "we may not be able to afford the luxury and the expense of slowing down the pace of industrialization (or urbanization) or its consequent changes in material living, but it is imperative that through thoughtful and purposeful planning we should give due consideration to the social and human consequences of changes so that we can make practical and effective use of the increasing knowledge of human behaviour and of developing experience in the field of human relations" (Clair, Drake and Omani, 1960: 27).

Social change occurs when new situations emerge alongside or over old ones. These situations bring with them certain conditions which may be defined by concerned people as "socially problematic" or as "social problems". A social problem thus exists when a significant number of people or a number of influential people feel that a particular condition is harmful and that something has to be done to rectify it. The skills of social workers may be employed to alleviate adverse social conditions through their operational public, private, civil society organizations, and non-governmental organizations. The fact that social workers operate in so many and diverse settings is itself indicative of the significance of social work in national development. Through them social workers provide a wide variety of social services to meet social needs or mitigate social problems.

16 Conclusion

In this article, the author has defined the terms of social work and national development. Within the context of these definitions an attempt was made to establish the relationship between the two concepts and found a strong and positive one. The contributions social work makes to development are many and varied. These contributions have been discussed through the presentation of the various approaches or strategies employed by social workers throughout the world and the role of social work in its totality in the history and present realities of development, in the developed and developing countries, the Global North and the Global South. The most important contribution of social work perhaps is the consideration it gives to the human and social sides of development. This is essential in order to avoid high material and economic standards without consequent matches in human and social standards.

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